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RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 1210
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0001
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0227
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ 0207
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0208
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 0215

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000213

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR INR/AA
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: EDO STATE MAKES PROGRESS AGAINST TIP, BUT THE
FUTURE IS UNCERTAIN

REF: 06 LAGOS 1220

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: A visit by Poloff with Global Trafficking in Persons Program Officer Amy LeMar to Edo State showed progress in combating trafficking in persons (TIP). Local organizations have been led by Idia Renaissance, founded by Edo State First Lady Eki Igbiniedion. Igbiniedion's anti-TIP campaign was initially unpopular but observers credit her with making significant headway against TIP. However, with the departure of the Igbiniedions from the Governor's mansion future anti-TIP activities are uncertain. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and private organizations, which have so far been adjuncts to Idia, will need to take the lead. End summary.

TIP from Benin to Italy

¶2. (U) Although not the State with the largest number of trafficking in persons (TIP) victims in Nigeria, Edo State is probably the most infamous because of the involvement of many of its inhabitants in trafficking of young girls to Europe, often to Italy, for the purpose of prostitution. The Italian-bound trafficking is focused on Turin. NAPTIP estimated that 80 percent of internationally trafficked Nigerian victims are from Edo State. Olaide Gbadamosi, from the Network for Justice and Democracy in Benin City, told Poloff the majority of TIP victims come from Edo South District, from the Bini peoples, economic migrants who traveled to Italy to find a living.

¶3. (U) Jennifer Ero of Idia Renaissance told Poloff trafficking to Italy began in the 1990's when women started traveling to Italy for prostitution. Prostitution followed previous patterns established travel by businesspeople and by Nigerians. Soon however, the demand for prostitution started to move to younger women and girls.

¶4. (U) Villagers back in Nigeria saw these girls as

successful, and chose not to ask how the girls earned the money. According to Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi of the Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON), parents often did not ask the traffickers about prostitution, but instead asked the trafficker to take their daughter to Italy so that the family could have money. (Note: Under Nigerian law, child labor is legal if it is not for illicit purposes or heavy labor, and the work has the consent of the child and his/her parents. End note) Additionally, traffickers have used traditional religion magic to put a hold on the victims, who, regardless of their faith, believe in the efficacy of the magic. Many of the first women who went to Italy gained notoriety because some of them purchased large homes in Edo when they came back to Nigeria. Michael Otunba of the Nigerian Union of Journalists told Poloff that in Edo, the traditional festival of Igwe is the local "Christmas" when all Beninese come back, often with flashy cars.

15. (U) However, for most women prostitution does not result in financial stability or wealth. Olagbegi told Poloff while some girls became wealthy, some later fell ill and died of STDs or AIDS. These women travel back to Edo and die quietly, Olagbegi said.

16. (SBU) Speaking at a USG-sponsored media workshop in Lagos, trafficking victim Gloria told an assembled group about her harrowing experience. Unable to travel by plane, Gloria traveled overland with 25 girls, transiting through Niger and Algeria before reaching Morocco, where the group spent a year. In accordance with the agreement, through prostitution Gloria paid the madam \$25,000 in eight months plus incidentals, all of which went directly to the madam. After that, the local authorities found the girls and deported them.

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Edo State First Lady Tackles the Issue...

17. (U) Edo State First Lady Eki Igbinedion was among the first to tackle TIP issues. According to Otunba, before Igbinedion started TIP was not publicized and was ignored as an issue. Many Nigerian First Ladies have created private foundations, ostensibly to carry out charitable work. While often the work is charitable, some of the foundations have been sources of controversy as opponents have criticized these foundations as mere conduits to gain financial assistance for purposes other than for which the assistance was granted. However, critics and supporters have praised the work of the Edo State First Lady. Gbadamosi credited the publicity of Idia with increasing awareness of the issue, which has forced traffickers to move to more remote regions of the State.

18. (U) Eki Igbinedion founded Idia Renaissance as her foundation to work on women's and youth issues. Idia became deeply involved in anti-TIP activities. In her first two years, Igbinedion encountered a lot of local resistance, said Otunba. Traffickers had a lot of powerful patrons and it was difficult to convince these patrons that trafficking was a problem in Edo. However, in the past six years Idia has managed to gain more headway in publicizing TIP and assisting victims, Otunba said.

19. (U) Idia has taken the lead on many trafficking-related issues, serving as almost an extension of the Edo State government. Idia has a close relationship with NAPTIP, and the agency has often referred its victims to Idia for protection services. On Poloff's visit to Benin, Poloff viewed the Idia Youth Center, funded by a \$300,000 grant from UNICEF with equipment assistance from USAID. At the youth center, students gained training in tailoring, computers, and cooking. The students also receive HIV/AIDS instruction. Ero told Poloff that thirty of the students at the Center

were TIP victims, although their identities were kept secret.

...But Her Effort May Not Continue Past 2007

¶10. (SBU) In a meeting with Global Trafficking in Person (G/TIP) Program Officer Amy LeMar and Poloff in December 2006, Eki Igbinedion said there was still much left to do in Edo against trafficking. Eight years ago, Igbinedion said, locals did not discuss TIP issues; she credits her own efforts through Idia to changing that. However, when Poloff asked about Idia's future activities Igbinedion was vague, commenting, "We shall see what happens in 2007," referring to the upcoming gubernatorial election that will name a new governor to succeed her husband.

NGOs Poised to Lead Fight Against TIP

¶11. (U) Poloff visited the NAPTIP shelter in Benin City. The shelter has a capacity of 25, and is intended for temporary use only. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) managed the Benin City shelter before transferring control to NAPTIP. Bridget Nwaka, shelter manager, told Poloff while Edo State donated the building and paid for the rent, the agreement expires in May. The future of the shelter, according to Nwaka, will depend on the next government.

¶12. (U) Poloff also met Sister Florence Nwaomima, who is planning to construct a second shelter with funding from an Italian Catholic group. Nwaomima admitted she had never visited the NAPTIP shelter, which does similar work. However, Nwaomima said her shelter will provide a faith-based alternative to the NAPTIP one.

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¶13. (U) One promising initiative spans several states in the region. Girls Power Initiative (GPI), located in Edo, Cross-River, Delta and Akwa Ibom states, is a non-profit organization that trains young women between 13 and 18 years of age as part of a three-year program. GPI was created in 1994 by Bene Maduaragu in Cross-River and Grace Osakwe in Edo. The founders realized young women needed to know about the issues that affect their lives, and designed the GPI program. The young women attend Saturday sessions with facilitators who teach empowerment, image, shared experiences, abstinence, and skills training. GPI hosts an annual seminar on trafficking, which includes members as peer educators.

¶14. (U) Poloff spoke in Benin City with Ehita Ikohoghode, Delta State coordinator for GPI. Poloff also talked with several young women who were articulate spokespersons for GPI. GPI largely recruits through word-of-mouth. Graduates of GPI have formed the GPI Alumnae Association (GAA). GPI alumnae are valuable mentors to girls under pressure to go abroad. The total number of GPI graduates is small, but GPI also runs a one-year program for 20 outreach schools.

NGOs Report Prosecution Poor in Edo State

¶15. (SBU) Olaide Gbadamosi, Director of the Network of Justice and Democracy, said Edo State prosecuted three traffickers and secured one single conviction. Gbadamosi said criminals go free because of the poor drafting of charges and the refusal of the TIP victims to testify. Corruption often causes cases on trafficking to end inconclusively, Gbadamosi commented.

Comment

¶16. (SBU) Edo State's anti-trafficking campaign has made progress. While trafficking remains a serious problem in the State, Idia and others deserve credit for raising awareness. With the Igbinedions soon to depart the governor's house, Idia may likely assume a lower profile. It will be up to the next Governor to see that Edo State takes its trafficking problem seriously. NAPTIP, which has been underfunded and neglected in Edo, will need to become assertive and work with the NGO community to keep anti-trafficking an important issue in the State. End comment.

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